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Nixon: A Loner Since Watergate

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Nixon, a loner before, seems even more alone since the Watergate scandals separated him from his two closest aides, H.R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman.

White House insiders say that C. G. "Bebe" Rebozo, a frequent Nixon companion, is the only friend they can recall having dined privately with the President at the executive mansion in recent months.

Even the Nixon family circle at the White House is dwindling. Tricia and Edward Cox have taken up residence in New York, Julie and David Eisenhower live in a Bethesda, Md., house rented from Rebozo.

Mrs. Nixon and Julie have described the Watergate as agonizing for the President and tragic for the families of Haldeman and Ehrlichman, who resigned April 30. "We've been friends so long," Mrs. Nixon said.

The Nixon family has taken up a theme pronounced by lawyer son-in-law Cox that "Watergate is a thing of the past." Investigators will thrash it out, they say, and the President must move ahead with his important official business, including the foreign policy breakthroughs which they think will make his mark in history.

In earlier, happier days of his presidency, Nixon explained himself:

"I am a somewhat unusual man to be in political life, because I tend to be less gregarious, frankly, than the average person in this position in political life. I don't tend to be a first-namer, or basically shall we say, too familiar. That is my nature ... I tend to be somewhat formal."

From the time he moved into the oval office, Nixon established a pattern of depending on his staff, even for news reports.

One aide describes Nixon as operating "with the conduit philosophy, the way an efficient executive of a large corporation would work." He prefers written reports to personal meetings, the aide said, because "meetings take time and the President is a very good budgeter of time."

In his personal life as President, Nixon quickly demonstrated a desire for privacy, hideaways and frequent changes of scenery. A weekend spent in the White House is a rarity for him.

In one 10-day period earlier this year, Nixon visited his retreats at San Clemente, Calif., on the Pacific Ocean, Key Biscayne, Fla., on the Atlantic and Camp David in the Catoctin Mountains of Maryland. He frequently goes from Key Biscayne to a friend's private island in the British Bahamas.

In the White House he sought so long to win, Nixon is said to find the trappings of the famed oval office distracting and has established a smaller hideaway in the Executive Office Building next door.

Aides cannot recall Nixon ever working in his shirtsleeves. His only concession to informality on the job is to wear a sports jacket occasionally.

Once when there were reports that the President sported flared purple trousers at Camp David, White House Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said "well, he wears sports clothes from time to time. I think 'flared' is a little exaggerated. Some of his slacks have cuffs on them. I mean he's a regular guy, he wears sports clothes."

But purple? "I don't know about purple," said Ziegler, "some of his slacks are blue."

Nixon also retreats to the tiny Lincoln Sitting Room of the second floor family quarters in the White House, where he often has a cozy fire—even in the warm weather—and listens to music, from stereo equipment stored in a closet.

Nixon recently explained his need for aloneness:

"Great decisions, if they are to be good decisions, must be made cooly ... Of course, I like to hear everyone, but then I go off alone and decide..."

He has established Camp David, located on an isolated wooded mountaintop, as one of his chief decision-making spots. It is a 20 minute helicopter ride from the White House, which one of his daughters has likened to a big, empty hotel.

Nixon runs in place for exercise and bowls occasionally at two lanes in the Executive Office Building next door to the White House or at Camp David alleys. He likes swimming, goes in just about daily when he's at Camp David, and bragged about taking a plunge in the heated pool there once when the temperature outside was "five degrees below."

Nixon dines on a low-fat diet he says "keeps you in better mental shape—it does me." His weight is around 172 now.

Recently he set the record straight about his reported taste for cottage cheese and ketchup. It's spiced up more often now with pineapple. "You have to dress up cottage cheese to eat it," Nixon said.

One of his favorite simple dinner dishes is reported to be baked breast of chicken with lemon juice, oregano and chopped parsley fresh from the White House garden.